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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the information available regarding the effects of teacher enthusiasm in elementary, secondary and postsecondary settings and reports on a recent study examining effects of teacher enthusiasm with learning disabled adolescents. Operational definitions of enthusiasm as well as speculations regarding the nature of its effects are also provided. Students in two junior high school special education classrooms for learning disabilities were given 2 weeks of instruction in science with levels of teacher enthusiasm manipulated in a crossover design. Videotape recordings were used to rate teacher enthusiasm and appearance of student learning and engagement. Learning was evaluated by means of a post test. Results indicated that: (1) enthusiasm is a variable which can be manipulated; (2) learning disabled students appear to be more interested when teachers are enthusiastic; (3) students receiving the enthusiastic teaching scored substantially higher on post test evaluation; and (4) classroom behavior was more acceptable with enthusiastic teaching. Implications for special education practice as well as suggestions for incorporation of instruction in enthusiastic teaching in teacher training and inservice programs are offered. Graphics detailing findings are appended. Includes 19 references. (Author/DB)

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Generating Excitement: Teacher Enthusiasm and Students with Learning Disabilities

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of
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Abstract

This paper will summarize the information available regarding the effects of teacher enthusiasm on students in elementary, secondary and post-secondary settings, including a recent examination of teacher enthusiasm with learning disabled adolescents. Operational definitions of enthusiasm as well as speculations regarding the nature of its effects are also provided. Implications for special education practice are discussed as well as suggestions for incorporation of instruction in enthusiastic teaching in teacher training and inservice programs. Graphics from the conference presentation are included in an appendix.

Generating excitement:
Teacher enthusiasm and students with learning disabilities.

What is Teacher Enthusiasm?

Enthusiasm has been identified as an important characteristic of effective teachers (Brophy & Good, 1986). Research regarding teacher enthusiasm has generally indicated that it is associated with positive effects in classrooms. Previous examinations of the effect of teacher enthusiasm on a variety of students will be discussed after the foloowing setction which provides an operational defintion of teacher enthusiasm.

Operational Definition

Collins (1978) identified 8 indicators of teacher enthusiasm which were subsequently employed by Bettencourt et al. (1983). This model considers teacher enthusiasm to be represented by eight elements: a) rapid, uplifting, varied vocal delivery; b) dancing, wide open eyes; c) frequent, demonstrative gestures; d) varied, dramatic body movements; e) varied, emotive facial expression; f) selection of varied words; g) ready, animated acceptance of ideas and feelings; and h) exuberant over-all energy level. For example, enthusiastic teachers might move briskly about the classroom; speak in a clear, distinct voice with varied inflection and vocabulary; make frequent eye contact with various members of the class; and openly solicit and accept student contributions. Conversely, unenthusiastic teaching would be characterized by the relative absence of these elements. Unenthusiastic teachers might be more likely to stand or sit in the same position in the classroom; speak in a more uniform and unexpressive tone of voice; make less frequent eye contact or animated facial expressions; and generally interact less with their students.

Is Teacher Enthusiasm an Alterable Variable?

The operational definition presented above was employed in two investigations of the ability of teachers' ability to intentionally alter their exhibition of enthusiasm. Collins (1978) was able to effect improvements in the levels of enthusiasm observed in preservice teachers trained according to the present model of enthusiasm. Bettencourt, et al. (1983) obtained a small though reliable difference in enthusiasm observed in laboratory videotapes made by practicing teachers. Detection of strong variations in teacher enthusiasm may have been more difficult in these studies because it is likely that some of the participants were already exhibiting high levels of the enthusiasm indicators. Nevertheless, these examinations indicated that enthusiasm is a variable which, to an extent, was under the volitional control of the participant teachers and was available for improvement.

What are the Effects of Teacher Enthusiasm?

Previous investigations have noted positive enthusiasm-related changes in: (a) achievement, (b) classroom behavior and (c) attitude toward the instructor. For example, Rosenshine (1970) stated that teacher enthusiasm yielded a positive effect on student achievement. A number of other authors have reported positive findings for teacher enthusiasm on achievement in a variety of settings (e.g., Coats & Smidchens, 1966; Mastin, 1966; Williams & Ware, 1976, 1977; Wyckoff, 1973). Additionally, improvement in classroom behavior was associated with teacher enthusiasm by Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall and Hull (1983). Finally, consistent improvement in college student perception of enthusiastic teachers' competence was demonstrated by Chaikin, Gillen, Derlega, Heinen & Wilson (1978).

While the results presented above are encouraging, enthusiastic teaching has on occasion, failed to produce the desired positive results. For example, Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall and Hull (1983) were able to obtain a significant positive effect for on-task behavior but did not detect any

meaningful improvement in academic achievement. Land (1980) compared the effects of teacher enthusiasm and teacher structure on undergraduate college students' achievement and perception of the teacher. In this case, structure had a significant effect on achievement, but enthusiasm impacted only upon student perception of the teacher's enthusiasm. From these reports, it seems possible that teacher enthusiasm may have a differential effect on academic achievement as a function of learner characteristics, such as level of academic achievement, age, or socio-economic status.

All of the examinations presented above were conducted in regular education settings with subjects who were characterized as generally adequate learners. Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) conducted a thorough search of the literature and found no research regarding the effects of enthusiastic teaching on students with learning disabilities. Perhaps the lack of empirical research is responsible for the absence of reference to teacher enthusiasm in special education methods textbooks. Of 23 methods textbooks examined by Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri, only two (Cruickshank, 1966; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1987) explicitly called for enthusiastic teaching. Cruickshank (1966) provided testimonial endorsement but no empirical evidence in support of teacher enthusiasm. Mastropieri and Scruggs (1987) supported their call for enthusiastic teaching with evidence from research conducted in regular education settings. A variable which has the potential to impact positively on achievement, behavior and attitude is clearly worth consideration. However, given the somewhat inconsistent findings presented above, positive effects of teacher enthusiasm on students with learning disabilities are far from a foregone conclusion. The study by Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) described in the next section examined the effects of teacher enthusiasm with a group of adolescents with learning disabilities.

Will Enthusiasm Impact Positively on Students with Learning Disabilities?

Given the generally positive though inconsistent findings regarding the effects of teacher enthusiasm in regular education settings, Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) speculated that teacher enthusiasm could have a positive impact on the classroom performance of students with learning disabilities. They suggested a number of reasons to believe that teacher enthusiasm would yield outcomes with LD students similar to those observed with regular education students along with factors which might be associated with negative outcomes.

Reasons for Hope

Teacher enthusiasm could serve to command attention and promote positive affect (Rosenshine, 1970). If so, it could be expected to yield positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities. This may be particularly true for LD students with problems related to motivation (e.g., Licht & Kistner, 1986; Oka & Paris, 1987) and attention (e.g., Aylward & Whitehouse, 1987; Krupski, 1986).

Reasons for Doubt

Students with LD may consider animated, dynamic instruction condescending or "babyish," and may respond negatively. These students may also lack sufficient social cognitive ability to appropriately interpret teacher enthusiasm (e.g., Pearl, 1987).

Mixed Expectations

Enthusiasm may have a positive effect on one aspect of student functioning, but not another, or the magnitude of the effect may be either smaller or greater than anticipated.

The following sections provide a brief overview of the Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri investigation of teacher enthusiasm. A more

complete description of the investigation is contained in the research report (in press).

Method

Subjects and Design

Students in two junior high school special education classrooms for learning disabilities were given two weeks of instruction in science with levels of teacher enthusiasm manipulated in a crossover design. Each class received each enthusiasm condition for one week. With the exception of enthusiasm, each lesson sought to optimize "teacher effectiveness" variables.

Two instructional units of comparable difficulty were provided. Instructional materials were designed to ensure that pupils in each condition received identical content, visual aids, and examples. Four consecutive days of instruction were followed by a 17 item post-test.

Under enthusiastic conditions, the teacher sought to maximize each variable on the Collins (1978) list of enthusiasm indicators. Under non-enthusiastic conditions, the teacher remained seated and attempted to suppress each enthusiasm indicator.

Measures

Video tapes were made of each instructional session. These tapes were analyzed by 32 independent raters to determine the level of teacher enthusiasm. Appearance of student learning and student engagement were also rated from taped samples. On-task behavior ratings were also collected during each instructional session using a time-sampling procedure. Finally, each four day unit of instruction was followed by a post-test regarding the content of the unit.

Results

The results of this investigation are presented in summary form in this section.

First, enthusiasm is a variable which can be manipulated. Across 32 independent judges using a six point Likert-type scale, mean enthusiasm ratings of 2.27 in the low enthusiasm condition and 3.98 in the high enthusiasm condition were calculated. This finding is in agreement with findings reported by Collins (1978) and Bettencourt et al. (1983) though its magnitude is somewhat greater than those earlier observations .

Second, students with learning disabilities appear to be more interested in their lessons when teachers are enthusiastic. Students in the enthusiastic teaching condition were given a mean rating of 5.33* (SD = 0.55) while students in the unenthusiastic teaching condition were given a mean rating of 1.67* (SD = 0.55), t (29) = 26.49, $p < .001$. This represents a substantial difference in the appearance of the classroom during instruction which is readily available to external observers, in this case, undergraduate special education majors.

Third, students of enthusiastic teachers appear to be learning. Students judged by independent raters on the degree they appeared to be learning were given a mean rating of 5.20* (SD = 0.61) while unenthusiastic condition students were given a mean rating of 2.03* (SD = 0.67), $t(29) = 20.80$, $p < .001$. Again, teacher enthusiasm was associated with a substantial and readily noticeable positive difference in the appearance of the classroom.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, students learned more with an enthusiastic teacher. Students receiving enthusiastic teaching, scored substantially higher (M = 7.71, SD = 2.50) than when they received less enthusiastic teaching (M = 4.29, SD = 1.98), $t(6) = 2.70$, $p = .036$.

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* Scores derived from responses to a six point Likert-type scale.

Finally, classroom behavior was more acceptable with enthusiastic teaching. Mean percent of off-task behavior was 22.97 (SD = 14.34) in the enthusiastic teaching condition and 36.18 (SD = 26.78) in the unenthusiastic condition, $t(13) = -2.57$, $p = .023$.

Conclusions

The data available regarding the effects of teacher enthusiasm is drawn from a wide range of educational settings, serving a variety of students. These settings include elementary, secondary and college classrooms serving students typically found in those settings. Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) expanded the available data regarding enthusiasm by examining the effects of intentionally varied teacher enthusiasm on the classroom performance of adolescents with learning disabilities. Taken as a whole, the research regarding teacher enthusiasm leads to several conclusions.

Enthusiasm appears to be an alterable variable. By intentionally altering the enthusiasm indicators developed by Collins (1978) teachers are able to demonstrate variations in enthusiasm. While the magnitude of this variation may differ from individual to individual, when operationally defined, enthusiasm appears to be in part, volitional.

Changes in the elements of enthusiasm are generally notable to students and observers. Thirty-two raters showed reliable discrimination of high and low exhibition of the enthusiasm indicators (Brigham, Scruggs & Mastropieri, in press). Given this result, enthusiasm appears to be worthy of mention in teacher preparation and inservice courses. The most beneficial characterization of enthusiasm is as a goal for which to strive rather than a state that, once attained, will persist across time and activities. Dissemination of practical techniques for maintaining highly enthusiastic teaching across a school year would be a clearly helpful next step in this area of teacher behavior.

The effects of enthusiasm appear to be somewhat related to age. Older students benefit most strongly and positively. Junior high school LD students' behavior and learning were noticeably different under enthusiastic teaching conditions. It is possible that enthusiastic instruction provides encouragement and support for persistent effort on the part of students with a history of learning difficulties.

When effects of teacher enthusiasm are present, they are positive. Enthusiasm can have an impact on: (a) students' attitude toward instructors, (b) recall of information, and (c) classroom behavior. No instances in which enthusiastic teaching was associated with significantly depressed outcomes were located in the literature search conducted by Brigham, Scrùggs and Mastropieri (in press).

Teacher enthusiasm appears to be an important aspect of effective instruction for students with learning disabilities. Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) found that students with Learning Disabilities respond to enthusiastic teaching with increased achievement and improved classroom behavior.

A variable which has the potential to improve classroom management, student achievement and students perception of instructor competence is clearly worth consideration. Teacher enthusiasm appears to be such a variable. By employing the operational definition developed by Collins (1978), Bettencourt et al. (1983) as well as Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) obtained improvements in teacher enthusiasm in a manner which could prove to be cost-effective and worthy of consideration for inclusion in teacher training and inservice programs alike.

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Appendix A

Presentation Graphics

What Is Teacher Enthusiasm?

Enthusiasm has been identified as an important characteristic of effective teachers (Brophy & Good, 1986).

Collins (1978) identified 8 indicators of teacher enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm Indicators

1. rapid, uplifting, varied vocal delivery
2. dancing, wide open eyes
3. frequent, demonstrative gestures
4. varied, dramatic body movements
5. varied emotive facial expressions
6. selection of varied words, especially adjectives
7. ready, animated acceptance of ideas and feelings
8. exuberant over-all energy level

To date, enthusiasm has been examined only in regular education settings. No research on the effects of teacher enthusiasm in special education could be found. Therefore, Brigham, Scruggs and Mastropieri (in press) investigated the effects of teacher enthusiasm on performance of LD students.

Is teacher enthusiasm an alterable variable?

Two examinations seeking to alter the enthusiasm displayed by practicing and preservice teachers attained positive results.

1. Collins (1978) was able to effect improvements in the levels of enthusiasm observed in preservice teachers.

2. Bettencourt, et al. (1983) obtained a small though reliable difference in enthusiasm observed in laboratory videotapes made by practicing teachers.

What are the Effects of Teacher Enthusiasm?

Previous investigations have noted positive enthusiasm-related changes in:

1. Achievement

2. Classroom Behavior

3. Attitude toward the instructor

Will Enthusiasm Impact Positively on Students with Learning Disabilities?

Reasons for Hope:

Teacher enthusiasm could serve to command attention and promote positive affect. If so, it could be expected to yield positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities. This may be particularly true for LD students with problems related to motivation and attention.

Reasons for Doubt:

Students with LD may consider animated, dynamic instruction condescending or "babyish," and may respond negatively. These students may also lack sufficient social cognitive ability to appropriately interpret teacher enthusiasm.

Mixed Expectations:

Enthusiasm may have a positive effect on one aspect of student functioning, but not another, or the magnitude of the effect may be either smaller or greater than anticipated.

What We Did:

Students in two junior high school special education classrooms were given two weeks of instruction in science with levels of teacher enthusiasm manipulated in a crossover design. Each class received each enthusiasm condition for one week. With the exception of enthusiasm, each lesson sought to optimize "teacher effectiveness" variables.

Two instructional units of comparable difficulty were provided. Instructional materials were designed to ensure that pupils in each condition received identical content, visual aids, and examples. Four consecutive days of instruction were followed by a 17 item post-test.

Under enthusiastic conditions, the teacher sought to maximize each variable on the Collins (1978) list of enthusiasm indicators. Under non-enthusiastic conditions, the teacher remained seated and attempted to suppress each enthusiasm indicator.

Video tapes were made of each instructional session. These tapes were analyzed by 32 independent raters to determine the level of teacher enthusiasm. Appearance of student learning and engagement were also rated from taped samples.

Behavior ratings were collected during each instructional session using a time-sampling procedure.

What We Found:

1. Enthusiasm is a variable which can be manipulated. Across 32 independent judges using a six point Likert-type scale, mean enthusiasm ratings of 2.27 in the low enthusiasm condition and 3.98 in the high enthusiasm condition were calculated.

2. Students with learning disabilities appear to be more interested in their lessons when teachers are enthusiastic. Students in the enthusiastic teaching condition were given a mean rating of 5.33* (SD = 0.55) while students in the unenthusiastic teaching condition were given a mean rating of 1.67* (SD = 0.55), $t(29) = 26.49$, $p < .001$.

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4. Students learned more with an enthusiastic teacher. Students receiving enthusiastic teaching, scored substantially higher (M = 7.71, SD = 2.50) than when they received less enthusiastic teaching (M = 4.29, SD = 1.98), $t(6) = 2.70$, $p = .036$.

5. Classroom behavior was more acceptable with enthusiastic teaching. Mean percent of off-task behavior was 22.97 (SD = 14.34) in the enthusiastic teaching condition and 36.18 (SD = 26.78) in the unenthusiastic condition, $t(13) = -2.57$, $p = .023$.

* Scores derived from responses to a six point Likert-type scale

Conclusions:

* Enthusiasm is an alterable variable. By intentionally altering the enthusiasm indicators developed by Collins (1978) the teacher considered here demonstrated substantial variations in enthusiasm.

* Changes in the elements of enthusiasm are generally notable to students and observers. Thirty-two raters showed reliable discrimination of high and low exhibition of the enthusiasm indicators.

* Effects appear to be somewhat related to age. Older students benefits most strongly and positively. Junior high school LD students' behavior and learning were noticeably different under enthusiastic teaching conditions.

* When effects are present, they are positive. Enthusiasm can have an impact on:
    Attitude toward instructor
    Recall of information
    Classroom behavior

* Students with Learning Disabilities respond to enthusiastic teaching with:
    Increased Achievement
    Improved Classroom Behavior